



Reading Eco-spirituality, Indigenous truths and Self-affirmation in Smitha Sehgal's *Brown God's Child**

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Abstract— Indian English literature with its well-established identity and evolved aesthetics seems to have garnered well-deserved attention from the most distinguished litterateurs and critics globally. The proliferation as well as the phenomenal success of Indian writings in English in the last few decades is a testament to the fact that the creative-critical field has come of age and has attained much solemnity and significance despite being consistently put in a contested territory for its complex affiliation with the language of the colonial masters. From the times of having 'ambivalent' attitude towards the politics and ideologies of imperialism, colonialism and capitalism to the point, where these writers, equipped with post-colonial stance and globalectical imagination are asserting their indigenous identity and eloquently transcribing their Indian experience with a renewed commitment to Indian thought, with due emphasis on its pluralistic, multilingual, syncretic and eco spiritual philosophy, it can be stated that Indian English literature's contribution to world literatures in English is quite definitive and tangible. These works, by maintaining an equilibrium between the anglophone and the native writing traditions, have secured a distinctive place in the literary ecosystem of India, existing alongside literatures being written in Indian languages. Indubitably, these writings have come to acquire deeper implications, for showing a sustained engagement with post colonial subjectivities, politics, cultural milieu as well as histories. In its post-modern, post-colonial avatar, Indian English Literature refuses to be reduced to a monolithic identity and is, characterized by a sense of unity in conveying unequivocal reflections on fragmented identities, intertextual relations, blurring of gender/caste/class/race/ethnicity based boundaries, inexhaustible thematic and stylistic variety and conscious attempts to be heterogeneous, equitable, conscientious and faithful to native traditions and humanistic impulses. The present paper by situating contemporary Indian English poet, Smitha Sehgal's second poetry anthology, entitled, *Brown God's Child* into the larger tradition of Indian Writings in English, intricately explores the ideas of eco-spirituality, indigenous truths and self-affirmation towards facilitating the articulation of a decolonized and critically self-aware literary sensibility.



Keywords— Identity, Aesthetics, Post-colonial Subjectivities, Eco-spirituality Globalectical Imagination, Self-affirmation

Indian English women poets have markedly enriched the variegated field of Indian English Poetry through their pluralistic voices, rich cadences and refined sensibilities. Negotiating the caste, class, gender, race, language and sexuality divides, they express themselves in the most vociferous manner as their evolved poetic configurations question and examine the relevance of the handed down traditions and assert new perspectives in an

attempt to reinstate sanity in the polemically divided world. The contemporary scene of Indian English Women's poetry looks promising with the arrival of creative figures like Arundhati Subramaniam, Meena Kandasamy, Mani Rao, Sumana Roy, Rochelle Potkar, Nandini Sahu, Nabina Das, Maitreyi Bhattacharjee, Smitha Sehgal, Kashiana Singh, Tishani Doshi, Shamayita Sen, Basudhara Roy Chatterjee, Jagari Mukherjee, Nishi Pulugurtha, Nabanita

Sengupta, Shweta Rao Garg, Neha Bansal, Urna Bose, who with their readings, renegotiations and re-articulations of lives, cultures, emotions, ideologies, scepticism, reservations, disillusionments have traced the human predicament and the future of the humanity in all its complexity. With a strong conviction and the resolve to articulate the 'female experience' they approach the 'space of subjectivity' by questioning and challenging the canon as well as the conventional images postulated by male authors and centralizing the diverse experiences of women. Their poems invariably include conversations on and around gender stereotypes, immigrant experience, caste/class/gender/self binaries, socio-political digital realities, collective conscience, mental health, climate change, enhanced choices of agency, the urgency of self reflexivity and rhythmic possibilities in a world marred by discordance, dissonance and cacophony. Dismantling the politics of otherness through a sustained and deliberate struggle with the hegemonical forces, as well as the demystification and de-colonizing of meta narratives, these women poets have gained confidence in their voices, their dreams and are exploring alternative worlds, utopias for human survival and future growth of the civilization. These women poets have explored the possibilities that freedom and democracy may promise to individuals, from imagining a world with inclusive ecosystems sans injustices, sans discrimination, sans violence, sans exploitation and sans oppressiveness with a view to empowering all human as well as non human life forms creating models of sustainability, acceptability, belongingness, health and survival through an understanding of deep ecology, spirituality, global human rights and intersectional feminist approaches.

Its heartening to behold that Indian English women poets with their inclusive world view are re-imagining the universe and making creative/critical interventions in the field that has global ramifications- a step that has in turn afforded a consistent and steady identity to Indian English Literature justifiably envisioned as a large tree with stronger roots and higher branches, accommodating diversity, plurality, and difference. Taking leaps of faith, this post-independent, second generation of women poets, has responded to and articulated their opinions on all the contemporary concerns looking into and beyond the discussions of 'subjection' and 'subjectivity,' to entailing dialogues on glass ceilings, global ecoprecarity, the politics of vulnerability and sustainability, fictionalization of history, invisibility of the subaltern, roots and traditions, to reinstating their voices and place, to maintaining authenticity in post human age, to overcoming digital literacy gaps, to becoming catalysts of transformation and social change through digital empowerment, revaluing

women's literary tradition, conforming solidarity with global feminism and trans national human right movements, foraging newer paths, uncharted territories and taking newer roles in alliance with women of previous generation and women of future. It is in this connection that the present paper makes a detailed study of poet Smitha Sehgal and her distinctive contributions and trajectory under the sub genre or the movement of Women's Writing within the subcontinent as a potent force of rhyme, reformation and regeneration. Looking beyond the familiar constructions of femininity and refusing to be defined by the conventional roles and confinement to the 'enclosed space' of domesticity or the stereotypical images or commodification of women within the market dominated consumer culture, and fighting the biases inherent in work spaces, these women have shown determination, resilience and strength that has been the subject of interest to poets in general and women poets in particular. But this journey to selfhood and equal opportunities has not been easy and on the way women have fought numerous obstacles laid down by patriarchy and its various institutions such as capitalism, neo liberalism and totalitarian forces and reasserted their identity for the rights of a dignified existence to all. Converging the personal and the political in their creative imagination, these women poets have denounced inequality, violence, erasure and otherness and have entrusted their belief in a shared literary tradition, appreciating all women's and marginalized people's voices, with their stories bending back and forth establishing a continuum of shared existence and humanity. In their relentless search for meaning and empowerment, they have reposed faith in oral literary traditions and collective memories of their community and people. Their disbelief and struggle with normative language and its antiquated tools have prompted them to explore the possibility of language to combine themes as diverse as protest, nostalgia and belonging in powerful expression with the help of new and innovative linguistic features. Audre Lorde, American feminist poet and civil rights activist in her essay, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" drew upon the need to engage with the linguistic space as a site of ideological contestation, which may represent or misrepresent the truth, hence the need to pay attention to the language politics: "For those of us who write, it is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak it. For others, it is to share and spread also those words that are meaningful to us. But primarily for us all, it is necessary to teach by living and speaking those truths which we believe and know beyond understanding. Because in this way alone we can survive,

by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing, that is growth.”(43) In the Indian context the question of language as a choice for literary expression becomes even more pertinent and we see that almost all the women poets have responded to it in their own way as language not merely constructs our world, it also facilitates us in asserting our world view, identity and counteract to what we have grown as seeing and believing to be the truth. The needs of self discovery and self expression are in a way central to all women's writings. Audre Lorde further observes, “If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive.” Literature has significantly aided poets and writers in their quest for identity and in the affirmation of their existence and individuality and poetry of Smitha Sehgal is a clear manifestation of the fact.

Poet Smitha Sehgal is one of the rising stars in the Indian literary firmament, who deserves to be read and appreciated for her unique sensibility, confident voice and pertinent thematic considerations embodied in her well-crafted and effervescent poetic ruminations. Recognized as a 'Featured Poet' for the erbacce Poetry Prize in the year 2025, Smitha has gained wide recognition for her work in the prominent anthologies at home and abroad making her a strong presence in the field of women's poetry not just in India but also internationally.

While the discerning readers might recall her first anthology, “How Women Become Poets in Malabar(2023)” for a strong “female imagination” and explorations into gender dynamics in social relations, representations of gendered subjectivities, and the cultural spectrum of the Malabar region, her newest work continues to be impelled by her proclamation of a ‘woman's space’ as an individual, as a ‘writing woman’, with the necessary condition of a ‘woman's viewpoint’ and a fierce rejection of the received hierarchies in literary as well as social domains. The anthology “Brown God's Child” is all about feminist affirmations, cultural rootedness and the desire to proffer an indigenous vision for the world where feminine energy, poetry and ideas of coexistence and ecospirituality coalesce and inspire. The collection is aptly dedicated to the “Western Ghats and River Nila, to the sunlight and dusk, to the Arabian sea by the coast of Malabar” -physical and emotional spaces which are part of her mental and spiritual make up and which consciously, unconsciously resurface reminding one of the importance of native social milieu, cultural lineage and diverse linguistic literary experiences in shaping of one's identity and subjectivity. The very first poem of the volume, “Brown God's Child,” after which the volume is

named can be seen as her poetic manifesto that unveils her poetic concerns and is simultaneously marked by a strong affirmation of her identity which should be seen as a confluence of the landscape, the seasons, the topography of the coastal region, the ancient Gods, diverse practices, rites and rituals, linguistic features and her gendered upbringing which have been responsible for the crafting of her consciousness. Her poems do not necessarily encapsulate discussions on women's ‘struggles’, ‘silences’ or ‘subjugation’ for the sake of conforming to a certain ideology by following the trend, rather display a genuine concern with questions of identity, dignity, foregrounding the need for subversion of normative conditions in search of greater autonomy and rights for women and those living at the periphery of the society. Making an implicit reference to the fact of ‘brown burden’ or the racial discrimination faced by people of colour, diverse ethnicity, she talks about the need for change and ways to include the marginalized humanity in the mainstream. Referring to herself as the daughter of the soil, she takes pride in her ‘half Sanskrit-half Dravidian’ linguistic style and eloquently describes her lineage: “My Gods are forest dwellers,/their skin marked in burnt caramel/of the tropical sun. On Amavasya nights / they feast on flame-torched cassava /and salted mackerel.”(9)

Adhering to a post colonial identity, she chooses to align with her complex, raw native reality than a smooth urban metropolitan character. Her awareness of gender and cultural identity continually makes and unmakes her as she further observes in the first poem, “Brown God's Child” : “Sounds in my language/ are symbols of dark and light”(9) Walking her way through gender/ethnic biases, where she is identified for hair “as a mass of tangled roots and coiled secrets of equinox” she dares to “wander into faithless verses” choosing poetry as her armour against the mechanisms that are to be accounted for the ‘othering’ of indigenous people. In “Durga's Homecoming,” she makes us aware of the contradiction and hypocrisy inherent in our culture where women are simultaneously worshipped as goddesses while being subjected to unimaginable physical, mental, psychological trauma and violence because of their vulnerability, ignorance and the misogyny inherent in human cultures. Even in the ritual worshipping, the poet's heart remembers those women who went missing and those who were forgotten and were obliterated from society's memory: “Count grass and rice grains/in 108 numbers, as many names/of women gone missing.”(10)

Emily Dickinson was fervently committed to truth in her creative journey, as could be seen from her following assertion in a letter written to Mr. Higginson, “truth is such a rare thing and it is delightful to tell it”. Similarly, in Smitha's poetry, one can observe a deep reverence for

truth-telling in the most objective, nonetheless in the most effulgent manner. Talking about her fragmented existence and her quest thereof a certitude and concreteness, she explodes into metaphors, finding analogies with, "I am broken/into the many breaths of women/who have gone out into the desert/with feet smelling of sunset." (11) The poem "Perimenopause" is a deep exploration into womanhood and the myriad of travails, one is subjected to and, which somehow are conducive to the creation of beauty, meaning and life in its extended form. Unraveling the joys of motherhood but not without its accompanying untold pains, she revisits the process: "a mother said children raise you from the dead/ her face wrought with things I could only know/ all the while I hid the stars and slivers of desire/ rained down the hill on hours of death/ turning my womb into a red marsh." (13) Imagining the womb as a 'red marsh' she enables us to see the whole experience of motherhood from a new perspective, wherein lie the possibility of future but not without the painful remembrance of unborn dreams, repressed desires and aspirations for being and 'becoming.'

In *Brown God's Child* the interaction between the physical landscape and the individuals is an unambiguous one and an invigorating one. Unpacking the whole experience of being born in Malabar, several poems lead us through enchanting array of images, instantly driving us into the world of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. Mostly rural and coastal imagery comprising of wood smoke, soft white appams, pot of fish moilee, coconut groves, ripe paddy, coral reef, sliced pineapple, piquant summer, holler of fishermen, salted mackerel, drumstick flowers, monsoon, the earthy smell of petrichor collectively refer to the bio-cosmic rhythm ushering us into the lap of nature. Regretfully, humans, the Gods of the anthropocene era, have alienated nature and other indigenous identities as well as non human entities, further problematizing their mutual existence or interdependence, taking them down the path of destruction as the poet agonizes: "We're busy with our wars, we don't have gardens/ or flowers. We have cut down our trees and hills,/ quarried and mined our mountains ravaged/ our honour, stifled the bountiful Neela into a shallow/ stream. our oceans have turned black with sorrow, birds and stars drop dead from our wrathful skies." (75) Many poems serve as reminders that by prioritizing ecological integrity and aligning with eco spiritual energy, humanity can reclaim their inner balance and forgotten songs.

Mostly confessional, the poems draw from her vast repertoire of experiences in the field of legal justice, ethical retribution, but alongside also reference the despair, the exclusion, the emotional psychological scars, felt by those who are to bear the brunt of socio-political and

cultural apathy. Confronting the linguistic, cultural marginalization boldly, the poet determinedly celebrates the beauty, the diversity, the mellifluousness, the raw texture and the colloquial quality of the indigenous languages in her verses. Despite writing in English, her commitment to her native language is quite pronounced. She connects to her roots, languages and dialects in an unequivocal manner. Taking pride in the diverseness, plurality and cultural polyvalency- regular features of her everyday existence, she feels encouraged to retrieve and re-claim her 'native history.' What ostensibly seems to be a 'palindromic forest of fireflies/rooted in the deep mulch of timeless Prakrit' set in the 'honeycomb of vowels and rough-hewn /cloak of landslides,' (16) her language glimmers with an inherent beauty, melody and a raw intuitive quality oozing through her expressions. Smitha's poetry has to be seen as an evolved mode of language brimming with consciously imbibed and unconsciously inherited traditions and practices surrounded by which she feels the compulsion to defy and subvert normative conditions and cultural presuppositions as well as hierarchies of meanings leading to the formation of a unique female subjectivity. Her questionings and critical attitudes about religion, mythology, gender, sexuality, ecology, ideology, history, nation, and almost everything else lend her poetry a very self conscious trait furthering the need for a closer engagement with her verses.

The collection is extremely eclectic as it braids together the region's history, mythology, reminiscences of friends and family, existential questionings and sundry reflections on nature's munificence, indigenous values and pursuit of hope and respite in the face of world's deepest inequities. In the poem "Drumstick Flowers" the poet with the help of a set of objects, situations, felt emotions, sequence of events, shared experiences transforming them into potent symbols or 'objective correlatives' conveys the dread felt by a woman, stuck in an abusive relationship, suffering physical and mental violence as "she's afraid of nights" making reader comprehend the pervasiveness of crimes against women. In a rather empathetic enactment of the situation, she extends her solidarity to Vasanthi, asking her to be fearless and not to be daunted by any barbarity concluding with a befitting retort: "And why should you be?" The poem blurring the difference between the real and the mythical context, bringing a picture from another world, ends on a sordid note making readers' aware of the routine cruelty against women with the final line, "a goddess drowns." (70)

Most of her characters inhabiting this collection are alive with a strong sense of humanity. The poem "Noon Ripens" is significant as it brings home the fact of labour in the life of a woman as she says, "A woman must go on, be it rain

or sun (71)" reminding one of Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper," Nirala's "Woh Todti Patthar (English Translation: "That Woman Breaking Stones") and Robert Frost's "Mowing" and "The Tuft of Flowers" leading to the ironical insight that the muse of many a male poets, silently bears the burden of every civilizational grief. Thus breaking free of the idealized and the idolized notions of themselves, rejecting the eulogies offered by male poets and writers, women wish to come out of the haze and talk about their predicament and live in reality. The poem "Immigrant" brings to light the subordinate status of women in society and also the way love and marriage result in the extinction of their individuality, as the poet calmly reflects through metaphors: "The slang for love/also meant 'to drown' /in our language.(28)"

Further, in a very unique way, the meaning of each poem depends on other poems: there's a circularity and interconnection that helps readers decode the meaning of these nuanced verses. "A poem for Delhi" is an ode to the historical city making us witness the glory, the time lapse, the cultural shift, the urban decay, the neglect of its majestic architecture and the cultural spirit, the growing alienation and the fragmented identity of the city dwellers. It's with an unflinching honesty that she ruminates over the struggle of humanity with violence, indifference, disease, pollution, corrosion of values, war, patriarchy and the hegemony of the powerful and the cruel resulting in the horrifying sounds of doom. In response to these threatening conditions, Smitha's poetry, moving with passion and alacrity works towards the regeneration and renewal of society. Poetry, for her, like the inherited family heirloom- a bronze clip, holds the conscience of the generations and becomes a keeper of moral ground in times of uncertainty, when, borrowing the words of W.B. Yeats, "the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity." ("The Second Coming") The juxtaposition of "the smell of blood and bread and Ghalib's anguish"(14) in "A poem for Delhi" is highly evocative and conveys a generational disillusionment with condensed imagery. The poems blend the regional, the mystical and the feminist awareness, converging multiple consciousness to create a powerful immersive poetic experience.

Some of the poems continue to be in dialogues with poets and writers of earlier epochs, giving her poem an intertextual resonance, requiring readers to read and reread the verses for deeper interpretation of the context or symbolism. One can often hear the poetic echoes of Jayanta Mahapatra and Sugathakumari in poems that are explicitly marked by eco consciousness. The questions of desire, faith and belonging are raised again and again with the help of striking images and thought-provoking reflections,

bringing constantly to mind the poetry of Kamala Das. The poem "Praying" is one of the gentle reminders to the humanity about the lost symbiosis that existed between humans and nature and the loss of which come with the flouting of the code of mutual respect and dignity. The poet's observation "What is time/ but a line that never ends?" brings to mind the lines of T.S. Eliot from "Burnt Norton" evoking the memories of the irredeemable past and future and their irreversible connection with the present. Bending backward and then forward with a dramatic sense of continuity, the poet's persona as a healer, works her magic through "the silence of broken things." She skilfully captures the vibrant tropical scenery of "God's own country" while crafting dry, witty, and ironic vignettes that invite pondering. In her poetry, there is humour, there is flippancy, there is irreverence, there is grace, there is thought, there is music as well as practical pragmatic sense. To her, poetry is "but God's flesh and blood" (55) The imagery in her poetry is strikingly original and breathtaking due to the fact that it has distinct visual appeal: "The Image is more than an idea. It is a vortex or cluster of fused ideas and is endowed with energy" as observed modernist poet Ezra Pound. She often invites readers to explore the depths of human imagination and thinking, making us see her constant engagement with equality and justice. The following lines from the poem "Lord Shiva" are important in this connection: "Is the sun a woman? Has she toggled the stars,/ the red planet, the galaxy? What lies in the prayers of rivers, under the amber skin/ of oceans ripening?" (49) Her quest for alternative reality as 'everything is socially and linguistically constructed' and is meant to favour some and neglect others, she makes it possible to talk about re-vision, recognition and re-clamation through her strategies of exploring the paradox, the underlying tension, the irreconcilable with a sense of familiarity, commitment to truth and warmth of a fellow being. Several poems unravel the darkest secrets of Indian homes and society, bringing their over hyped sanctity into question wherein lay buried the suppressed desires, silences and traumatic experiences of the larger female world. The poem "No singing" brings to the fore, the issue of childhood trauma that steals the joy and innocence of the happiest phase of one's life, turning it into an unforgettable horrifying memory forever, as the poet reveals: "His thick fat fingers grazed/ my waist once,/ before I broke away abrupt/ to play hopscotch." (69)

In many of her poems, we find her revaluing women's experience and acknowledging their significant contributions to society. The expert on laws on gender justice in her makes us see the burden that women carry and the many lives they are subjected to live despite frameworks and policies such as, Maputo Protocol and

Istanbul Convention. In the poem titled, "Beyond Maputo Protocol," she enquires, "In that line where you say women hold up/ Half of the sky, have you not seen/ They are solitary watercolors treading/ Barefoot in the pastoral fields bundles/ of corn stocks balanced on their heads" (61)

Understandably her themes are varied involving love in the war-torn Gaza, the hawkers of the war, the dispossession and the displacement, humans writing an elegy for the earth through their mindless actions in the anthropocene epoch and much more. With a felicity of diction, visual and sensuous imagery, unified sensibility and unique symbolism, her poetry narrates the familiar, the unfamiliar, the concrete, the abstract, the definitive as well as the inconclusive with ease and finesse. She is unpretentious, candid in her approach and her poetry besides displaying a subtle aesthetics maintains a strong moral sense alongside gentle demeanour. She faithfully renders her experiences of the self and the world, oftentimes making us question the status quo and seeking to re-establish fairness and justice in all spheres of life. Beneath the familiar tropes of Jasmine, autumn leaves, pomegranate blossoms, snow melting, one is sure to find images of subversion that take us to the image of a strong womanhood. With an impressive command over the poetic expression and its various features such as imagery, tone, rhyme, rhythm, register, literary and cultural allusions, mythological references, her poetry shines with intellectual as well as emotional depth.

On reading this anthology, one is bound to agree with the poet's strong individuality as a woman and her choice to write as a woman, as one can discern an 'écriture feminine' at work marked by a sense of abundance, profusion of creative energy, a strong awareness of the self, a confident way of articulation, joyful celebration and even rebelliousness permeating every single verse. One is reminded of what Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray and other feminist scholars observed about 'women's writing,' associating it with creative extravagance, playful excess, physical materiality of the female body, qualities that one can find in plenty in Smitha's poetry. Her writing is essentially polyphonic and challenges the privileged unitary notion of truth by interacting between languages, discourses and ideologies and pluralizes in terms of meanings and representations. The ideas of self-interrogation and self-renewal are integral to her philosophy which she steadily applies to all relations. The poem addressed to Kamla Das is an overt tribute as well as a recognition of a shared literary tradition or poetic inheritance. When she says that "I too want to feed a lover by hand/ drift into sleep by the river, in the secret knowledge/ being light, a bird or a fish," she literally, metaphorically dreams through her dream, thinks back

through her, appreciating her voice, her story and shares a literary kinship with her in recognition of her body, sexuality and desires, seeking fulfillment, autonomy, resisting patriarchal inhibitions that inflict unrealistic and flawed standards of modesty, decorum, suppression of desires.

The idea of the "Brown God" permeates through the anthology, yet its detailed explication can be seen in the poem titled "The Reign of Brown God" that evokes the ideals of liberty, equality, fraternity, fearlessness, modesty and a heightened sense of responsibility. With an excellent use of myths and archetypes the poet brings home the lessons of benevolence, virtuosity and humility taking us through the lore of Daitya King Mahabali and Vaman, and the vision of a utopia. The poem "Sita" brings back the memory of historical oppression of women kind in India, their self righteousness, limited agency and the potential for subversion of identity beyond the body politics. Turning the Sita myth from being an archetypal victim to a warrior to a saviour of the degraded conflict ridden civilization, she writes: "Each day you feed your failures/ with fire, the nothingness of questions,/ idiosyncrasy of answers./ You harness the betrayals and turn them/ into sunlight. You dip a finger in the wounds/ of time, struggling not to die. A mimosa flower." (73) Symbolizing beauty, resilience and lasting fragrance, the mimosa flower can impart a perennial identity to Sita who through her virtues makes oceans shudder and skies tremble and, in her radiance is incomparable, as the poet quips: "You, Sita, daughter of Earth/ How could you be anyone else?" (73) Many of the poems dialoging with the past, make us revisit the images of women, the archetypal suffering humanity, show the possibility of resistance in the popular myths by posing questions pertaining to desire, body politics and gender inequality. Many of the poems show the tension inherent in women's consciousness as they refuse to identify with tropes of femininity, and to be intimidated by power and control exerted by patriarchal economy. A poem like "Between My Country And Theirs" clarifies that even though surrounded by the skeptics, non-believers and hate mongers, poets can still "sow poems on the skin of dead earth, hoping for tulips to rise again". (39) "Once there was a woman" is a testament to the isolation, grief, felt pain and the never ending oppression faced by women and their fortitude and resilience. Smitha's ability to depict the locale with all its specificity, rendering it the aesthetic of a verisimilitude is unmatched. As a poet she is as much vexed by the structures of patriarchal society, cultural and historical forces as by the questions of inner peace, autonomy of an artist, women's language, conservatism versus modernity in socio-cultural assumptions. By making critical inquiries into the false

boundaries and the differences that set humans apart from each other and the physical world and other entities, she systematically deconstructs the binaries of urban/rural, margins/ centre/, visible/invisible, culture/nature, and shares the ecocentric values with collective responsibility and makes important interventions in the field of women's writings.

The success of the anthology lies in Smitha's admirable control over the matter of her delineation as well as the vision that her poetry carries, encompassing deep concerns for ecology, sustainability, human rights and equal opportunities for the subaltern, the downtrodden, the destitute, the forgotten, the specially abled, the simple farmers, masons, househelps and artisans, reinforcing the pressing needs of peace, indigenous wisdom, freedom and love that permeates through all the living beings and the universe that nurtures all. Through an exhaustive exploration of the mythology, the topography and cultural history of Malabar region, the religious and socio-political spectrum, the poet is able to impart a hopeful vision for the future hearing truth "in the blueness of lake" and in the poems, where moon opens "a parasol of gold," thus deconstructing the anthropocentric myth and making us realize the interaction and veracity of the human and the non human world and the melody arising out of their creative synergy.

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